

Castlemaine Naturalist

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Yellow legs- *Mycena* aff. *epipterygia* – Geoff Harris

Beach Nesting Birds and Recreationists – From Conflict to Coexistence

Speaker: Dr Mike Weston, Deakin University, 13.6.08

More and more people are using beaches for recreation. But for too long many have ignored the fact that our presence on beaches poses a direct threat to the beach environment and the native inhabitants that live there. Dr Weston's studies of beach nesting birds are aimed at breaking down this potential conflict between recreationists and conservationists.

Migratory birds have received a good deal of attention but little has been done to understand and protect resident shore birds such as the Red-capped Plover, the Pied Oyster-catcher, the Sooty Oyster-catcher and the Hooded Plover. These birds, like humans, are wide spread along our coast and prefer sandy wide-backed beaches and warm weather. Dr Weston and Grainne Maquires' research on the Hooded Plover aims to show how the survival of these tiny beach inhabitants depends on our understanding and direct conservation efforts.

Hooded plovers are almost exclusively birds of surf beaches. They breed and spend the entire year on the beach. They like wide beaches backed by dunes (rather than cliffs) with lots of flotsam and jetsam (particularly seaweed) but not much vegetation. They make their nests in very cryptic scrapes in the sand often in among seaweed. They are omnivorous and eat almost anything. They take 26-28 days to hatch, 2-3 hours to start feeding, and another 35 days till they can fly. The adult birds struggle to keep the temperature constant during the brooding period as the eggs laid directly on the sand are subject to extreme ranges of temperature. They are sensitive to human activity but the adults are not very good at alerting us to the presence of chicks preferring to just move away from the nest. If danger looms they give an alarm call and the flightless chicks run, crouch and freeze making them very vulnerable to predators (magpies, gulls, ravens and dogs). Busy weekend crowds add the extra threat of humans - even a carelessly placed towel can cause a chick to be separated from a parent bird.

Six Hooded Plover counts between 1980 and 2006 indicate a trend that numbers are decreasing in all but two areas. It is thought that numbers at these two sites might be recovering from local extinction as they were reported as frequent visitors in both areas around 1900.

A project from 1994 to 2000 to colour-band the birds showed that the majority are critically tied to the coast, that pairs stayed together, and they occupied consistent territories with a high overlap of breeding sites. 22% of eggs survived to hatch, 20% of chicks became flying young, and then 55% of juveniles made it to adulthood. Once they reached adulthood they were very good at surviving.

Reproduction proved a threatening time with one female laying six lots of eggs in one year. Nest failure was due to crushing (dogs, 4 wheel drives, people), disturbance (adults don't defend), predation, (while adults feeding) and thermal stress. Chick mortality was high as result of their crouching/ freezing behaviour.

Since 1994 active management has begun at Mornington and Inverloch, a NSW Recovery Team has been formed, and a number of temporary beach enclosures (where false eggs monitored inside and out showed eggs are protected by enclosures) are proving to be successful.

Six ways coexistence can be achieved:

1. Survey all Hooded Plovers on the Victorian coast
2. Identify threats –beach access points, people, foxes, dogs, vehicles, horses, and litter. Existing Management is aimed at no vehicle access, dog beach signs and interpretive signs
3. Select sites based on total number of birds, necessity of management and accessibility
4. Create an Action Plan
5. Monitor effectiveness of management to ensure increase in the number of young birds.
6. Research into various styles of chick shelters, predator aversion training (nasty tasting false eggs for foxes), ways of addressing human attitudes, attitudes of dog owners and barriers to compliance.

Mike believes humans generally get the broad picture right but often get the details terribly wrong.

Frontier 1. The answer lies with stewardship, community involvement, and coastal management.

Frontier 2. Creating an end point by altering human behaviour, reducing predator levels, and creating effective coastal conservation areas.

Final Frontier. Deal with climate change because of habitat squeeze that will occur when water levels rise and lethal thermal limits that will affect the eggs which cope better with cold than heat.

Geraldine Harris

Chiltern – Mt. Pilot National Park – Gil Rayner

We bought a small property on the edge of the Mt Pilot Ranges, only metres away from the National Park; our plan being to sell our house in Maldon and move there. Sadly, with real estate in the biggest slump for quite some time, we now find ourselves being “weekenders” at our next house, but no real problems, as we’re using the time to plant as many local trees and shrubs as we can on our new block, and, of course taking the opportunity to visit and record as much as we can of the two National Parks. I say two parks, as there are major differences between the habitat and vegetation of the Chiltern patch and the much larger Mt Pilot area.

The Mt Pilot area was severely burnt by wildfire in 2003, and shows it. We walked to the summit of Mt Pilot and looked down on vast areas of burnt forest – hectares of massive regrowth, but scarred by the blackened upper branches of thousands of trees. These regrowth areas are densely covered by new young trees, and bushily regrown old trees. Happily, there seems to be a return of the more adventurous Honeyeaters (yellow-tufted and white-naped) but not much else. Of course, there may be more birds, but the density of the undergrowth makes observation difficult. The usual understorey plants seem to be less plentiful.

Around El Dorado, where our house is, things are much better, as that area, mercifully, escaped the blaze, although I would regard the bush there as somewhat degraded, with many weeds present – bridal creeper, thistles, and cactus to name just a few. The Reedy Creek runs through the area, and is quite full of water at the moment, and with the recent rain, many more birds are in evidence. I heard numerous Brush Cuckoos calling, but no sightings, however, lots of other birds. A pair of King Parrots, White-naped Honeyeaters, Turquoise Parrots, Yellow-rumped Thornbills, Rufous Fantails, Eastern Yellow Robins, Scarlet Robins and a pair of Whistling Kites, and of course the usual Grey Shrike thrushes, Kookaburras, Willie Wagtails, and Red Wattle birds. Pied Currawongs seem to be in huge proportions in El Dorado, and sadly, Starlings.

The vegetation is quite different to the Box/ironbark that I’m used to, some *Dianella* are present, and Rock Ferns, but Ironbarks are few and far between, also the familiar lower storey plants such as Gold Dust Wattle, and even Coffee Bush. Instead, Black Cypress Pines seem quite common, and the kind of ferns I was more used to when I lived in Gippsland. It seems like a kind of margin country, where some of the Gippy vegetation mixes with the Central Vic vegetation, and even wombats are found there, plus the usual swamp wallabies.

We took a day trip to visit Chiltern, a lovely well preserved old town, and took a picnic to the Honeyeater Picnic Area in the Chiltern patch of the National Park. The Chiltern patch is totally different, as it appears to be completely untouched, very grassy, and even with the occasional Grass Tree. Around the (dry) Cyanide Dam, there were birds in profusion, and amazingly tame. A Brown Treecreeper actually hopped onto our picnic table, and while walking around the dam, the

Treecreepers hopped about our feet, likewise Superb Fairy Wrens, and Eastern Yellow Robins flew about us quite confidently.

Sadly, no sign of the Regent Honeyeater which apparently, can occasionally be seen there, but lots of Yellow-tufted and White-naped in profusion, with so much flowering gum about. The bird calls were everywhere, although we could still hear the distant rumble of trucks on the Hume, which dissects the two sides of the Park. The Chiltern section is probably one of the most unspoilt pieces of Box/Ironbark country that I have visited so far, and an absolute joy. We look forward to many more trips there while we're waiting for our Maldon house to sell – we're likely to know every stick and stone there with the Market as it is, but will certainly be making the most of it!

SEANA Spring Camp
will be at
Healseville
October 17th to 19th 2008

For details see the website at <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~rfnc>

Fungi Outing to Blackwood with Ballarat FNC – 8.6.08 -
Geraldine Harris

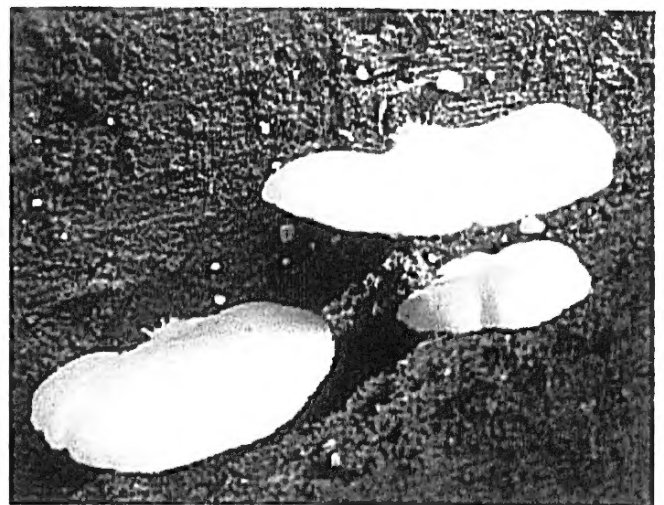
Having set off from the Garden of St Erth, we found our first fungi under the trees at the car park even before we headed over the hill along the Great Dividing Trail. Someone spotted a Yellow Robin but from then on we had our heads down searching the leaf litter and fallen trees for new fungi so there was little time for birdwatching.

We returned to the cars for lunch with a tally of about 25. After a lunch break in the sun we headed down into the valley for the afternoon fungi search. By the end of the day I had a long list of strange unpronounceable names (lots of fungi have no common name) and I hoped Geoff had a fairly close matching lot of photos. It was hard keeping up with Les at-the-front, who had the knowledge and Geoff at-the-back whom I wanted to keep up to date with the latest find but who was often delayed trying to get a "good shot" of an earlier fungi. By the end of the day I had a list of 50!

Those of us who were able to join Les Hanrahan and the Ballarat Group on their annual fungi outing were well rewarded with good weather, good company and a wonderful variety of fungi. Thank you Les.



Mycena cystidiosa



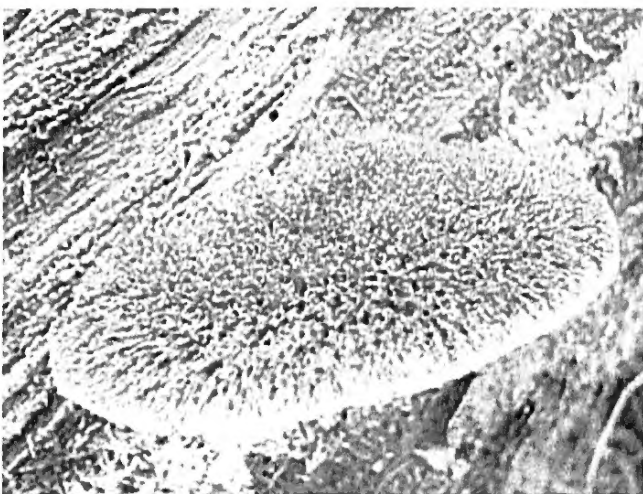
Crepidotus nephrodes



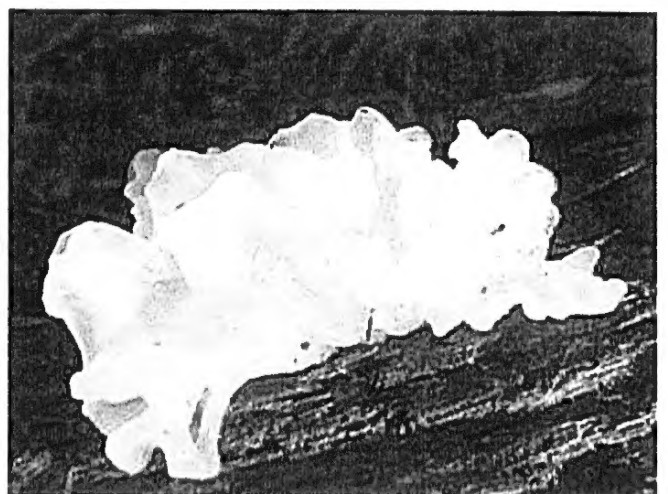
Amanita muscaria - Fly Agaric



Mycena nargan



Postia pelliculosa



Tremella fuciformis - Jelly Fungus

Photos by Geoff Harris

Gower School and Smiths Reef excursion 14.6.08 – Natalie de Maccus

After a brief stop at the Gower School, where we were poorly rewarded with flowering plants (nil) – but we saw a small mob of kangaroos – our band of a dozen explorers moved on to (literally) greener pastures.

Whilst proceeding along Donkey Farm Track our next stop was at a location on the left of the track (approx 2 kms from the beginning of DFT). I had marked the spot by piling a few small rocks on top of a large one which was already on the track verge, so that I and anyone else who would like to find the location in future could do so. At this point the land falls away and there is a rocky ridge as a guide. Here I had discovered not only a few flowering Greenhoods (*Pterostylis parviflora* -Tiny Greenhood), but hundreds of Greenhood rosettes (species unknown) which promised a future magnificent display. A return trip in a few weeks could be rewarding.

Having ooh'd and ah'd over this find we moved on to Smith's Reef where the dam held very little water. However we were rewarded again by the discovery of Greenhoods – this time *P. parviflora* and *P. melagramma* (Tall Greenhood). Perhaps a dozen of each. The discovery was made by two of the males who paid less attention to afternoon tea than to discovery. What was the purpose of our trip anyway? Afternoon tea can be eaten at home any day. By this time we had added two other flowering plants to our list - *Acacia genistifolia* (Spreading Wattle) and *Cassinia arcuata* (Coffee Bush).

George Broadway took a longer route home (via Tatt Town Track) where he expected to find *Astroloma conostephioides* (Flame Heath). Photographic proof of his success was produced at the next committee meeting. Congratulations George for following your instincts!

If you want information about Gower School and Smith's Reef there is an excellent pamphlet – [text and photo by Ern Perkins and published by Mount Alexander Shire and CFNC] available at the Market Building.

Bird sightings –

1. Gower school -

Magpie	Red Wattlebird
Fuscous Honeyeater	Yellow faced Honeyeater
White plumed Honeyeater	Yellow tufted Honeyeater
White naped Honeyeater	White browed Babbler (~ 6)
Striated Pardalote	Swift Parrot (~ 6)

2. On track and at the dam -

Buff rumped Thornbills	White winged Choughs
Brown headed Honeyeater	Varied Sittella
Raven sp	S Blue Wrens
Scarlet Robin (male)	Spotted Pardalote

Observations

- ◆ 60 Yellow tailed Black Cockatoos – Rita Mills
- ◆ 40 – 60 Swift Parrots are 'in residence' at the Golf course. Lately observed on the ground eating moss? (haven't seen this behaviour before) – Debbie Worland
- ◆ 1. Found a Brush tailed Phascogale road kill near the Maldon turn-off.
2. observed a YTB Cockatoo in a group of seven feeding a young bird in a tree. 3. Tall Greenhoods on Odgers track – Denis Hurley
- ◆ An unprecedented visitor dropped into my backyard on 5th June – a little male Sparrowhawk sat on the fence for a minute or two looking very alert, then launched himself at – you guessed it – sparrows!! Don't know if he was successful, as he chased them across the neighbour's yard and disappeared – Noel Young
- ◆ Flowering plants seen in June- 1. East Wombat forest: *Acacia macromata* (Narrow leafed Wattle), *Epacris impressa* (Common Heath) and 2. Fryers Range State Forest: *Acacia aspera* (Rough Wattle), *A. genistifolia* (Spreading Wattle), *A. lanigera* (Woolly Wattle), *Epacris impressa*, *Astralaria humifusum* (Cranberry Heath), *Lomandra filiformis* (Wattle mat-rush), *Pterostylis melagramma* - (Tall Greenhood), *Leucopogon virgatus* (Common Beard-heath), *Grevillea alpina* (Downy Grevillea), *Correa reflexa* (Common Correa), *Philotheca verrucosa* (Bendigo Waxflower) and *E. leucoxylon* (Yellow Gum.)

Bird sightings: Kororoit ck. early June: Thousands of Silver Gulls, scores of White Ibis, Pacific Gull, Masked Lapwing, Pelicans. Sunshine south, mid June: ~40 Crested Pigeons. Late June: Kororoit Ck; White faced Heron "fishing" for worms, Little Egret, Black Duck, Mountain Duck, Moorhens plus regulars – Little Black Cormorant, Little Pied Cormorant and Darters. - Richard Piesse
- ◆ Grey Shrike thrush, Crested Shrike-tit, Spotted Pardalotes and E Yellow Robin along our creek. Large flocks of Ibis in the paddocks. Families of White plumed Honeyeaters around the house. Also along the creek; Lawyers Wig fungi – *Comprinus comatus* – Geraldine Harris

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme

July 2008

Fri July 11 meeting: Nigel Harland on Cocos Keeling/Christmas Island.
Sat July 12 field trip: Aboriginal sites walk with Maryborough FNC – Bull Gully aboriginal wells and canoe tree, with optional afternoon tea at Maryborough Station - leader Lorraine O'dal.

August 2nd & 3rd Swift Parrot National survey – spotters needed: contact Debbie Worland or Chris Morris

Fri August 8 meeting: Sheila Houghton on Fungi
Sat August 9 field trip: Fungi walk at Firth Park
Fri Sept 12 meeting: Listening Earth - "earth song" presentation
Sat Sept 13 field trip: Morgans Track walk

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 8.00 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at Natalies; 65 Johnstone Street, at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.

Subscriptions for 2008

Ordinary membership: Single \$27, Family \$35

Pensioner or student: Single \$24, Family \$29

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

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